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ABSTRACT

This position paper outlines the actions of a National Council for History Education (NCHE) conference. A six-part action plan was elaborated for offering students a solid and engaging study of history by enlarging the profession to include "scholars teaching history." The paper cites 29 points broken down into the following 6 sections: (1) "Actions by and for Teachers"; (2) "Actions by and for Education School Faculty Members and Deans"; (3) "Actions by and for University Historians and Department Chairs"; (4) "Actions by and for Local School Administrators and School Committee/Board Members"; (5) "Actions by and for Representatives of State Departments of Education"; and (6) "Actions by and for Members of State Education and University Governing Boards." In addition, the paper considers how NCHE, with its resources, can help all those who want to respond with action to enlarge and sustain a corps of scholars teaching history in the schools. The paper reiterates the most promising features of the national campaign for history education reform: (1) basic history education should include fundamentals knowledge and an understanding of the way such knowledge is discovered and verified; and (2) knowledgeable students of history are best taught by instructors who have a deep background in the subject-matter-content of history and a thorough understanding of effective ways to help students learn the content and skills of history. (BT)

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ENLARGING THE PROFESSION:
SCHOLARS TEACHING HISTORY

a Plan of Action from the NCHE Conference, *Preparing Knowledgeable and Effective History Teachers**

NCHE
National Council for History Education

National Council for History Education, Inc.

An Open Letter

To: Middle and High School Teachers, History and Education Faculties, State, Local, and University Officers and Governing Boards

"My people don't know these things—they can't handle this stuff!"

The speaker: a local social studies coordinator. The "people:" middle and high school history and social studies teachers. The "stuff:" a framework of content standards for a common core of instruction in world history. Some "things" teachers supposedly did not know, or know well enough to "handle:" Taoism, Aristotle's six forms of governance, Hobbes, 19th Century "isms," Russian emancipation, Sun Yatsen, Weimar. Meetings with the teachers proved the coordinator only half right. Some were true scholar/professionals, in full command of their material. Others knew so little history of the West and the world that they were unable to interpret and teach the textbook, much less go beyond it.

This was the problem put to our October 1997 conferees on teacher education, co-hosted by the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents.* If, according to the standards-based strategy for democratic school reform, all students in every school are to be offered an equally solid—and engaging—study of history, then all teachers need equally rigorous preparation to teach them. We know that the two preconditions for children's equal opportunity to learn are a common, required core of vital substance and teachers ready to convey it. But high and common academic standards pose two kinds of challenges for teachers. First, many of them must now be assigned to teach about places and eras they have not taught before, and do not know. Second, they will be expected to teach in new ways—to work in both depth and breadth, with both primary sources and textbooks, to nourish both memory and analysis in their students, to pursue significant questions with colleagues across the grades, to explain the concepts of social science in varied settings of human life at particular times and places, and to introduce their students to the music, art, architecture, literature, and

(continued inside)

* This conference was held on October 17-18, 1997, at the Abbey, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, and was made possible by a major grant from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation of Milwaukee.

philosophy of other peoples and eras.

All of this requires the ease and confidence, and joy, in teaching history that come only with professional mastery of large swatches of the subject. Our Wisconsin conference was to explore the conditions under which such mastery can be nurtured, and what changes were needed to bring about and sustain those conditions—in the college educations of prospective teachers, in their continuing studies as scholars teaching history in the classroom, and in their daily responsibilities and status as professionals.

In planning the conference, we followed the NCHE's first principle of operation: bring together the different kinds of people who know different things about the same puzzle, even if they rarely speak to each other on the outside. For our many previous colloquia, institutes, and publications we have always gathered our "tripartite alliance" of university scholars, classroom teachers, and specialists in pedagogy. For Wisconsin—the object being nothing less than overturning the often sclerotic routine of teacher preparation—we had to invite new allies: superintendents and school committee members, department chairs and college administrators, members of state education boards, and trustees of public and private universities. In sum, those who set priorities (not least budgetary priorities) and can make a difference in the education and professional status of teachers.

In the fractured, absurdly specialized world of American education, such people rarely even see each other. Each tribe has its own association, journal, convention; each repeats its own rituals and incantations, largely ignoring the responsibilities all of them commonly bear. For two days in Wisconsin, we invited them to teach and learn from each other. What did they say? What were their complaints? What did they want each other to do? What did they see themselves doing? At first, complaints appeared to swamp solutions. They were numberless, acutely-felt, colorfully expressed; obstacles to their solution also seemed numberless. But we had brought the right people together. In time, participants from each constituency, scheduled speakers and audience members alike, presented each other with the elements for a comprehensive plan of action.

We now invite you to read the six-part Action Plan on the following pages, to take action in your own sphere, and to collaborate with colleagues in all the spheres, to enlarge the profession by seeing to it that, in every grade K-16, we have Scholars Teaching History.

Best regards,
National Council for History Education

Actions by and for Teachers

These points were made by and to teachers, both veterans and beginners, at the NCHE Conference.

1. For teachers, mastery of subject matter is indispensable. Only deep knowledge of times, places, people, and ideas enables them to a) design their own courses; b) choose topics to stress and questions to pursue, in depth or breadth; c) select materials; d) deal honestly with student inquiry; e) teach imaginatively to keep interest alive; and f) make illuminating connections with social sciences and the humanities.

2. Prospective teachers of history in middle and high schools should complete a college major organized around main topics and significant questions in United States history, the history of Western civilization and of the world, with related studies in civics, geography, philosophy, literature, and the arts.

3. Teachers, no matter how well prepared as undergraduates, have a responsibility to themselves and to their students to pursue their studies, both in state or local programs for professional development and on their own. Moreover, the thousands of history and social studies teachers now in classrooms who did not have a strong start in their college years must undertake intensive professional development, including summer institutes, to deepen their knowledge and pleasure in teaching.

4. Colleges and universities must end the jagged disconnect between education and history programs by requiring education and history faculties to a) design and teach courses as partners, combining historical content with subject-based pedagogical methods; b) collaborate to assemble teachable practice units, with readings, primary sources, and literature; c) supervise and mentor together their students' field experience; d) join to explore the needs of area schools; and e) design and provide (with help of experienced teachers) subject-matter-centered professional development in those schools.

5. Local school leaders need to respect the dignity of teachers by insisting that professional development providers a) carry out their programs on the NCHE pattern of collaboration of equals--teachers, scholars, educators; b) consult well beforehand to ascertain the needs and desires of the teachers in question; and c) bring elementary and secondary teachers together, for mutual understanding of each other's methods and expectations, and to articulate instruction across all school levels.

6. Local school authorities need to see that valuable professional opportunities, such as extended workshops, colloquia, and summer institutes, involve not only the usual self-selected few but a range of their teachers at all stages of expertise, and that, for greater effect, at least two teachers from any given school attend together.

Actions by and for Education School Faculty Members and Deans

These points were made by and to education school faculty members and deans, at the NCHE Conference.

7. University administrators and trustees need to revise policies that make it difficult for education faculty members to mend the "jagged disconnect" between subject matter and pedagogy by joining colleagues in history departments in merged courses, to do student teacher mentoring with historians and master teachers; and to work with them on professional development for neighboring schools, preferably at school sites.

8. Education faculties need the authority to reduce the required number of generic methods courses, in order to present team-taught courses with subject matter scholars and seasoned teachers from the field, and to allot more faculty time for direct assistance to student teachers and professional development programs.

9. Education faculties, together with colleagues from history departments, should redesign the undergraduate experience of prospective teachers to achieve a better balance between education and subject matter courses throughout their college years, perhaps including an introductory orientation course on education at the sophomore level.

10. Education faculties need to help local superintendents and school committees/boards to respect the professional status of teachers, including predictable course assignments, reasonable student numbers and class schedules, and leading roles in writing curriculum and assessment instruments. To retain scholarly and devoted teachers, local schools must give them time to study and plan with colleagues within and across grades, and to pursue their intellectual growth as scholars, whether on their own or in sponsored programs.

11. Education faculties, together with colleagues in history, must advise state boards and state departments of education on rewriting regulations and on designing subject matter examinations for teacher certification and re-certification.

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Actions by and for University Historians and Department Chairs

These points were made by and to university historians and department chairs at the NCHE Conference.

12. Historians must press university administrators and trustees to establish sustainable personnel policies that end the disincentives for history faculty members to work with colleagues in other departments to educate and mentor prospective teachers, to design and present programs for professional development of teachers in service; and to work directly with area teachers who are responsible for courses close to the historians' fields.

13. History faculties (with advice from graduates who have become classroom teachers) must review the character and requirements of their major and minor programs, keeping uppermost in mind the intellectual and professional needs of prospective teachers of middle and high school history and social studies.

14. To help their own new faculty members to be effective and confident, history departments, with the aid of colleagues in education and experienced classroom teachers, need to develop departmental mentoring programs on course design, varied teaching methods, assessment of student achievement, and academic advising.

15. Historians must join their colleagues in the Arts and Sciences to re-focus general education requirements of the freshman and sophomore years upon basic core courses, including for all students United States history, Western civilization and world history. Holders of bachelors' degrees, particularly teachers of any subject in middle and high school, should not have last studied human experience as long ago as Grade 9 or 10.

16. History faculties must be authorized to a) reduce the number of highly specialized courses for undergraduates; b) provide more upper-level broad-based courses in major eras of United States history, the history of Western civilization, and of the world; c) model the use of primary sources and student inquiry in their own courses; and d) forge regular working relationships with history teachers in neighboring communities.

Actions by and for Local School Administrators and School Committee/Board Members

These points were made by and to local school administrators and school committee/board members, at the NCHE Conference.

17. To the extent that state boards and departments of education establish common curricular requirements, content standards, and performance benchmarks for statewide assessment of student achievement, state support and technical assistance need to be available to local districts for a) implementing new curricula and courses; b) refreshing and extending teacher content knowledge; and c) instructing and re-integrating teachers who are displaced by curricular changes.

18. School districts need to establish regular procedures and criteria for evaluating teacher applicants, including exploration of academic records and references, and interviews dealing with candidates' scholarly interests and intellectual substance. Districts must also evaluate prospective history teachers for their competence in writing and speech, and their ability to instruct students in both.

19. In an era of standards-based school reform, school districts should not be made to pay for professional development programs outside of teachers' general subject matter areas. Teachers seeking out-of-field transfer into non-instructional positions should be expected to support their own efforts.

20. Principals, superintendents, and school committee members should periodically attend professional development programs, to better understand the different and particular needs--assignments, class schedules, materials, equipment, staff support--and desirable qualifications of teachers in the core academic subject areas.

21. Superintendents, principals, and curriculum coordinators should be required by school committee/board policy a) to recognize and reward scholarly accomplishments of school faculty members; and b) to that end, maximize regular and predictable course assignments for history teachers, enabling them to refine their courses and materials, and to develop their mastery of particular subjects and historical eras.

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Actions by and for Representatives of State Departments of Education

These points were made by and to representatives of State Departments of Education at the NCHE Conference.

22. State departments of education must consistently devote their priorities, review of regulations, and technical assistance to support steady, long-term local implementation of the settled state academic standards--the core subjects and how to teach them--with relatively less attention to outside associations and educational fashions often promoting narrow interests and frequent, often oversold, changes of direction.

23. State departments need to work with boards and trustees governing higher education in aligning the admissions requirements of public and private colleges and universities with the specific course requirements of state academic frameworks, in order to support local districts in raising and defending curricular standards and graduation requirements, and to improve the academic preparation of the college-bound.

24. Many state departments of education need to redesign examinations for teacher licensure and recertification to test mastery of subject matter. Such examinations should not fall to low common denominators but be comparable to finals tests at the university level, including attention to the writing and speaking ability of teachers of all subjects.

25. State departments need to collaborate with local school districts and institutions of higher education to set criteria for approval of professional development providers of state or locally-funded programs for classroom teachers of academic subjects. Such criteria should include the providers' academic qualifications and experience, and the direct relevance of proposed programs to the curricular goals of states and localities.

Actions by and for Members of State Education and University Governing Boards

These points were made by and to members of state education and university governing boards at the NCHE Conference.

26. Lay boards must take responsibility for seeing to the implementation of the above changes, focusing on those that state and local officers, university presidents and deans, for many reasons often cannot make on their own. Vital among these are higher college admissions requirements, specific core requirements for the general education of freshmen and sophomores, reformed department majors, broader doctoral programs to prepare college teachers, and revised incentives for faculties of education and arts and sciences.

27. Lay board members should patiently apply their capacity to engage and educate the media, and to inform the public and its elected officials, on questions fundamental to the quality and equality of educational opportunities, rather than leave reporters awash in press releases and whatever items seem novel or terrible at the moment.

28. To be effective, lay board members must do vast amounts of homework to master central educational problems and possibilities for themselves. Only then can they see around the masses of data furnished by state and university administrators, and understand the critical priorities to address and the choices to be made.

29. Since board members have voluntarily accepted responsibility for serving the public interest, their first obligation is competence. Together with persistence in the face of a number of likely defeats, it is also the first obligation of the members of every group represented at the Wisconsin conference. Governing boards may ultimately be held accountable for the quality of their institutions, but historians know that the failure of any one sector is enough to bring about the failure of all.

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How Can NCHE Help With Your Plan of Action?

The NCHE Conference on *Preparing Knowledgeable and Effective History Teachers* was unique in gathering people who often consider each other nuisances if not enemies, and who know the facts of life from many perspectives. At the Wisconsin Conference we all heard the actions we must take if we are to enlarge and sustain a corps of scholars teaching history in our schools. There is no mistaking these messages. The National Council for History Education pledges its resources to help all those who want to respond with action.

NCHE's Teacher Education Initiatives

Our programs bring together the most promising features of the national campaign for history education reform:

1) Basic history education should include fundamental knowledge and an understanding of the way such knowledge is discovered and verified.

2) Knowledgeable students of history are best taught by instructors who have a deep background in the subject-matter-content of history and a thorough understanding of effective ways to help students learn the content and skills of history.

These convictions grow directly out of our experience with three programs:

• THE NCHE HISTORY CURRICULUM GUIDELINES

The three-volume *Building a History Curriculum* series of booklets offers states, districts, schools, and individual teachers a bridge between the various state standards documents and their own specific concerns. Two of the booklets, **Building a United States History Curriculum** and **Building a World History Curriculum**, permit maximum flexibility in the construction of courses and curricula while emphasizing the content of history. They embody the kind of merged approach NCHE has called for in college courses jointly taught by education and history faculty.

Prepared with the assistance of outstanding historians and teachers, the series provides a template for organizing syllabi for such courses in U. S., Western, and World history--complete with required main topics, wide ranges of carefully-selected subtopics, materials selection and use, pedagogical methods, and an up-to-date-bibliography. The booklets are as helpful to faculty members who teach such courses as to the students who are preparing to be teachers. The series is also being used by assessment developers to aid them in writing well-chosen significant questions, and by writers of teacher certification tests.

• THE NCHE HISTORY COLLOQUIUM

A History Colloquium brings professional development directly to social studies teachers in their own school districts. In this staff development program, NCHE sends a tripartite team consisting of a master classroom teacher of history, an academic historian, and an education specialist to local schools that are seeking to refresh their History/Social Studies curriculum and background knowledge. With the help of our national network of teachers and administrators, we have worked with hundreds of teachers in over 50 school districts around the nation. A colloquium is designed according to the special needs expressed ahead of time by each host state, school, or district. But in each case, we break down false dichotomies between subject matter content and innovative teaching methods. And we bring elementary and secondary teachers to the common ground of the colloquium, for we think it essential for everyone to talk about substance so as to fashion a lively, non-repetitive sequence of courses. The *Building a History Curriculum* series mentioned above is the basis for agendas that aid teachers and curriculum planners in interpreting and implementing state frameworks.

• THE NCHE HISTORY TEACHER INSTITUTES

The NCHE has conducted two recent Summer Institutes for history teachers, one at The Ohio State University for teachers of K-12, and the other at the University of California, San Diego for teachers of K-6. Features of these 4-week ses-

sions are an emphasis on refreshing the knowledge of teachers in the content of history and providing them with the time, resources, and guidance to do serious original studies of their own. Teachers with a diversity of backgrounds have participated, wishing to meet their needs for teaching new courses and including more and better history in their already existing courses, especially if they did not already have a major or minor in history in their undergraduate preparation.

Summer institute faculty consist of leading academic historians, visiting scholars, and master classroom teachers of history, and topics include such historical eras as the nineteenth century in the U.S. and World and broad survey-type courses, which teachers at the precollegiate levels often teach when they go back to their classrooms. A wide range of materials is given to teachers--texts, monographs, original sources--together with the NCHE publications *Building A History Curriculum, Building a United States History Curriculum*, and *Building a World History Curriculum* .

• OTHER NCHE MEETINGS

NCHE also conducts national conferences: intensive two-day discussions, lectures, and workshops in the content and teaching of history at both K-12 and college/university levels. The 1997 Wisconsin Conference was one in a series of conferences in which NCHE has focused on specific issues in history education reform. Some of the other conferences were: *Building a History Curriculum* in 1993; *The Future of the Past*, held at Colonial Williamsburg in 1995; *Reinvigorating History in U.S. Schools*, at the Library of Congress in 1996, in which academics, teachers, and administrators from around the country gathered to discuss curriculum standards and issued recommendations for the future. A 1998 conference seeks means to strengthen the history curriculum in the elementary and middle school grades.

• STATE HISTORY COUNCILS

Another NCHE program enlarges the scope of the Council's outreach efforts to the states: more than half of the states are building independent state councils for history education, conducting conferences that focus on upgrading teachers' knowledge of historical topics, and helping to carry out our recommendations for history education reform at the state level.

Those who wish to respond to this Plan of Action for history teacher education are not alone. Because of NCHE's mission, our background of experience in the several programs outlined above, and our network of academic historians/classroom teachers/historical society personnel/education specialists, we can act as history education consultants and ambassadors for any point in the six-part Plan of Action. NCHE can help local districts and states develop criteria for:

- evaluating teacher candidates,
- for establishing reasonable course assignments,
- for approving professional development providers,
- for conducting institutes and colloquia,
- for evaluating teacher certification tests,
- for designing history majors and minors (including upper-level survey-type courses for prospective teachers),
- for designing jointly-taught collegiate courses,
- for freshman/sophomore core courses.

NCHE pledges its help at every step along the way.

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